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THE EARLY SCHOOLS OF INDIANA.

FROM PAPERS OF D. D. BANTA—THIRD INSTALMENT.

The Book Famine in Pioneer Days—Scarcity of School-books; Those Used—Preeminence of Spelling—The McGuffey Readers; Their Excellence—Home-made Writing Materials—The Difficulties of Arithmetic—Popular Opinion of Grammar—"Loud Schools"—The Reign of the Switch—A Few Anecdotes.

From the Indianapolis News of February 24, 1892.

HOW hungry did some who were boys here in Indiana fifty years ago become for something fresh and entertaining to read! Often have I heard that lover of good books, the late A. B. Hunter, of Franklin, tell the story of a book that was owned by a man living on the outskirts of his neighborhood. He had read everything owned by the neighbors that he cared to read, and now came the story of a new book—one unlike anything that he had thus far seen, and he was wild to get hold of it. At last there came a day when his father could spare a horse from the plow, and young Hunter went in pursuit of the new book, which was found, borrowed, and subsequently read with a zest almost unknown up to that time, for it was one of Sir Walter Scott's immortal stories.

It seems to me that scarcely any other thing so distinctly marks the difference between the present and the past of which I am writing, as the great scarcity of reading matter in that past compared with its great abundance now. I think it not too much to say that in my own "Shiloh neighborhood," all the books, excluding Bibles, hymn-books and spelling-books, owned by the neighborhood, could have been packed in a bushel basket. I call to mind "Hozzy's Life of Marion," "Trumbull's Indians," "Carey's Olive Branch," a "Natural History," "Western Adventure," a "Life of Selkirk," "Young's Night Thoughts," "Josephus," and "Pilgrim's Progress," and that was about all. No wonder if a boy living in that neighborhood would become so hungry for something to read that he had recourse to the inside of the lid of a certain big box in which was stored the family linen, that he might read the two exposed pages of a copy of the

Western Luminary that had been pasted thereon. The story may seem incredible, but that boy thus read the two pages of that old luminary many a time, and every time he did so he imagined he found a freshness in it that was charming.

But it is to the school-books, or rather want of school-books, of that time that I wish to call attention. There were comparatively few school-books published in those days. Every school child, at least after learning the letters, was expected to have a spelling-book, and Dillworth's and Webster's American were used in the beginning. The child who had not been taught his letters out of a Bible or hymn-book at home, usually brought a primer. I have, however, seen a paddle with the alphabet pasted thereon used instead of a primer or spelling-book. I never saw Dillworth's. Webster's elementary spelling-book, the most wonderfully successful strictly educational book that was ever published in America, at an early day occupied the entire field in Indiana, and practically held it until the appearance of McGuffey's Eclectic Speller, which was published somewhere about 1850. The elementary served the double purpose of spelling-book and reading-book. The old schoolmasters placed great stress on spelling. The custom, it is believed, existed universally in the country schools, at least up to and for some time after 1850, for the whole school to stand up twice a day and spell for head. A half-day in every week was given to a spelling-match, besides which night spelling-schools were of frequent occurrence. No one ever grew so large or so learned that he was exempted from the duty of spelling. I have known the head man of a long row of pupils to spell the first word without dictation, after which the next in line would spell the next word, and so on down to the foot, and then from the head on down again. The words in the elementary spelling-book were generally written in a sort of rhythmical order which made them easy to memorize. There were spellers who claimed to know the book by heart, and there were still more who claimed to be able to spell correctly every word in it.

I have said the elementary spelling-book was used as a reader as well as a speller, and so it was. On nearly every page was reading matter made up of moral sentences in each of which was usually found one or more words belonging to the annexed spell-

ing lesson. It was the practice to teach a pupil to spell first, after which he might read. Some teachers, after the scholar had learned to spell sufficiently well, required him to pronounce the words in the book at sight, and after he was able to do this sufficiently well he was formally set to reading. The "pronouncing lesson," as it was called, may have had its uses, but I have no doubt that many a pupil was reading quite well at home before being allowed to read at school. Do I not remember the first reading-lesson in the elementary spelling-book? No matter if the pupil could pronounce at sight all the words in the book, Charles Disbrow, of blessed memory (my old teacher), insisted that he who was going to take the long leap into the reading world should read the first lesson. As the boy who could read the Testament at home and pronounce all the words of the spelling-book at school stepped up to read his first and formal lesson, consisting of words of three letters, how silent that hitherto loud school would become, and how loud his own voice would sound as he read:

"She fed the hen.

"The old hen was fed by her.

"See how the hen can run."

Was ever ordeal worse than that? After the book had been read through and through, say half a dozen times, another reader was in order, provided it could be had. There were few school readers in those days. Here and there was to be found an old copy of the "English Reader" or the "Columbian Orator." Rev. George K. Hester tells us that he read a dream book and "Gulliver's Travels." I have seen Gulliver myself in the schoolroom; and so of the "Life of Marion," "Pilgrim's Progress," histories, sermon books and the Holy Bible. Henry Eaves, a pioneer schoolmaster of Switzerland county, in his extremity, took the *Frankfort Argus* into his school, which served the uses of a "reader." About 1835 B. T. Emerson's readers came into use to a limited extent. Somewhat later—five years, perhaps—McGuffey's Eclectic Series appeared and ultimately occupied the field to the exclusion of all others. The introduction of this series marked an era in the schools of the State. They were of incalculable benefit to the people of the western country. I think it not too much to say that the higher readers of the series did

more to cultivate a taste for the better American literature than any other books of that day. But for them the names of Percival, Bryant, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Irving, Paulding and other American authors of the first half-century would have been known to few indeed of the school children of Indiana of thirty and forty years ago.

The pupil having learned to read sufficiently well, he was next set to writing. The mothers usually made the copy-books by sewing a few sheets of foolscap together. The geese furnished the quills that were fashioned into pens, and the ink was home-made. Maple bark, sumach and oak balls and vinegar were the materials out of which most of the ink of that period was made. In its season pokeberry juice was sometimes used, but, notwithstanding its ornamental capabilities, its use was never very general. It was too apt to sour. The inkstands were generally home-made also. A favorite inkstand was a section of a cow's horn, sawed off and fitted with a wooden water-tight bottom. Another favorite one was made of lead or pewter. Many of the boys of the old school days understood the art of casting inkstands. The pupil's first exercise in writing was the making of "pot-hooks and hangers." In the fulness of time his teacher would set him his best round-hand copy, and in doing so he never failed of placing before the eyes of the scholar some moral or patriotic precept worthy of his remembrance, such as, "Commandments ten God gave to men;" "Eternal vigilance is the price of Liberty;" "Washington was the father of his country;" "Evil communications corrupt good manners."

The next thing in order for the boys was arithmetic. Not many girls gave any attention to this study. Not much was ever said about it as a girls' study, but I think it was generally considered that the girls did not have "heads for figures." Instead of arithmetic they took to geography and grammar, when they took to anything. It was the practice with a good many teachers to require their arithmetical scholars to copy all the "sums" in a "ciphering book." Mr. George Adams, who attended school in Johnson county away back in the twenties, had, a few years ago, such a book, and judging from it the writer must have understood fairly well his subject. Students in arithmetic never recited—they simply "ciphered." The teacher seldom paid

any attention to them unasked. The boys usually helped each other, but when help failed in that quarter the teacher would, on request, "work the sum." The majority of teachers thought they had done all that was necessary when that much was done. Sometimes a boy would "sneak" his arithmetic and slate into the school and "cipher" for a considerable time before the teacher discovered it. I did this myself, and traveled over addition, subtraction, multiplication and short division, before my teacher let on that he knew what I was about. I had reached long division, which I found so very hard that I broke down at it in despair. Washington Miller, my old teacher, seeing my trouble, came to me, and without any reproaching gave the needed assistance, and thence on I was recognized as an arithmetical student. My friend, Mr. Hunter, who is mentioned above, went to school to a teacher who did not pretend to teach arithmetic beyond the "single rule of three." Young Hunter had advanced beyond that. He took his seat in the schoolhouse, however, and ciphered away till he went through the book. There was a greater variety of arithmetics than any other school-book. Pike's was the one most generally in use. The familiar pages of a copy of this old veteran are now before me. Their matter consists of abstract rules and of examples. I am not much surprised that I stalled on the long division hill on that school day so long past. "Take for the first dividend as few of the left hand figures of the dividend as will contain the divisor, try how often they will contain it, and set the number of times on the right of the dividend," and so on. Not a word of explanation; no development of the process; nothing but the abstract rule. The other arithmetics of the time were Smiley's, Bennett's, Jess's, Dillworth's, Western Calculator, and probably some others. Smith's and Ray's appeared shortly before 1840, and in five or six years the latter had the field.

The geographies used were Moore's, Woodbridge's, Smith's and Olney's. These were the only school-books illustrated save the few pictures in the spelling-books, and there were very few children who did not delight to turn the leaves of a geography and look at its pictures. Lindley Murray's English grammar was the first in the field; after that came Kirkham's. There was not much studying of either geography or grammar in the

early days. As to the former, it was considered a proper enough study if one had the time to spare for it, but by some the study of the latter was deemed useless waste of time. As late as 1845 the trustees of Vevay in employing a teacher required in the written contract that he should "not teach grammar."

From the News of March 16.

The first schools I attended were "loud schools." Loud schools were the rule in the beginning here in Indiana; silent ones were the exception. The odds in the argument were believed to be in favor of the loud school. A celebrated Scotch teacher, Alexander Kinmont, of Cincinnati, as late as 1837, would conduct school by no other method. He claimed that it is the practical, philosophical system by which boys can be trained for business on a steamboat wharf or any other place. Both boys and girls spelled and read at the tops of their voices, on occasion, and sometimes the roar of their lesson-getting could be heard for a half to three-quarters of a mile. It is not much wonder that Owen Davis took his fiddle to school and solaced himself by playing airs while his scholars wereshouting over their lessons. The teacher of a loud school who would keep his pupils at work labored under a great disadvantage. The idler who was roaring at one word, or over a line of poetry, or trumpeting through his nose, was, for aught the teacher knew, committing his lesson. It was said of one boy in an Orange county school that he "repeated the one word 'heptorpy' from morning till noon and from noon till night in order to make the teacher believe that he was studying his lesson."

Fifty or a hundred years ago the swishing of the switch was heard everywhere, in the family circle and in the schoolhouse, throughout the length and breadth of the land. The fathers made their children "mind." The switch was the usual instrument, and its prompt and free use doubtless gave birth to such expressive phrases as "a lick and a promise," "the word with the bark on," and "tan your jacket." The schoolmaster, standing in the place of the parent, punished as freely and savagely, and usually with the full approval of the parent. One of the most curious phases of the flagellating period was the almost universal prevalence of the sentiment that the schoolmaster who neglected the frequent use of the rod was a failure as a teacher. I had a friend who, much less than fifty years ago, was in the

habit of occasionally playing pedagogue. In one of his schools he had a nice company of country urchins, between whom and himself there was the very best of feeling. After the school had run smoothly for a month or six weeks and no whipping done, his patrons began to think something was wrong. One morning one of them met him and bluntly told him that he was making a mistake—that he was “not whipping anybody.” “Why, who’ll I whip?” he asked. “Whip Sam,” was the prompt answer. “What for? He’s lazy, I know; but I can’t whip him for laziness, can I?” asked the pedagogue. “Yes, give it to him. Sam’s my boy and I know he needs it every day.”

Now and then the circumstances were so ludicrous that the master’s punishment, instead of inspiring terror, provoked laughter. I once heard a story told on a Johnson county teacher to this effect: He was in the habit of opening his school with prayer. His pupils, for some reason distrusting his sincerity, sometimes during the services would wink and smile and even snicker out. One morning he carried an empty flour sack to school which he put on the seat beside him, and while he was praying that morning, the irreverent conduct of two or three of the larger boys attracting his attention, he broke off his prayer and, seizing the empty sack, he struck each of the misbehaving lads over the shoulders, powdering them all over with the white flour, after which he concluded his prayer. Mr. Chute was an eminent schoolmaster in Evansville at an early day, who opened his school with prayer. He always stood, with a “long fishing cane in his hand,” and prayed with his eyes open. “When he caught a boy in mischief during prayer he would stop short and call out: ‘Woe be to you, John,’ and strike him over the shoulder with his long cane, and then resume his prayer.” Another and similar but better story than either of the others comes from Pleasant township in Switzerland county. An old gentleman by the name of Curry taught in that township for several years. “He was a widower and married man by turns.” Once when in the former state he went to the schoolhouse early in the morning to write a love-letter. When the pupils came he carelessly left it on his desk and proceeded to open school with prayer. Kneeling down he prayed with his “whip in his right hand and his right eye open.” One of the boys, stealing up to the desk where the

love-letter lay, began reading it; but ere he was aware the old man broke off in the middle of a sentence and, collaring him, gave him a sound thrashing, after which, adds the historian, "he resumed his devotions with equanimity.

It was the custom to whip on the slightest provocation, and not infrequently without any provocation at all. There is scarcely a county in the State that has not had, at one time or another, its teacher who would drink to intoxication on Saturday and soundly thrash every scholar in the school on Monday. The neighborhoods are full of the traditions of the savagery of the old schoolmasters. The schoolhouses fairly bristled with switches cut from the neighboring thickets. According to the historian of Morgan county, "these old instruments of punishment were always present and usually hung on wooden hooks over the old fireplace, so that they became so hardened by seasoning from the heat that they resisted the severest exercise of the teacher in an application on some offending pupil, and even cut the wooden benches as the teacher in his fervor pursued round and round the howling culprit." I read of a Bartholomew county schoolmaster who "kept his switches standing in the corner or lying on pegs in the wall, but the cat-o'-nine-tails lay in the desk. He punished with the former and terrified with the latter." A Martinsville schoolmaster flogged his pupils, it is said, on the least provocation, with a "long hickory gad, well-seasoned in the hot embers of the fire."

It would be a mistake to infer that there were no other punishments, save corporal, given in those days. The "dunce block," the "fool's cap," the "leather spectacles," "bringing up the switch," "standing in the corner," "standing on one foot," "sitting on the girls' side," and any and all other schemes the wit of the old schoolmaster could devise were tried. I remember to have seen a teacher remove a puncheon from its place in the floor and incarcerate a big girl in the "hole under the floor," which had been dug for clay to make the hearth, jambs and backwalls of the fireplace. I shall never forget how he pushed her fingers off the edges of the floor when he fitted the puncheon back in its place.

[To be continued.]